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C O N F I D E N T I A L UNVIE VIENNA 000107

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TAGS: [AORC](#) [MNUC](#) [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [IAEA](#) [XF](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: IAEA/ISRAEL/GAZA: ARAB STATES SILENT ON GAZA
DEPLETED URANIUM CLAIMS

REF: A. STATE 19853
[1](#)B. 09UNVIEVIENNA25

Classified By: CDA Geoffrey R. Pyatt for reasons 1.4 (c) and (e)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) We expected that Arab states/NAM might use the IAEA Board of Governors meeting the week of March 2 as a platform for expressing outrage over the recent war in Gaza. Our expectations were wrong. The Arab group had positioned itself to link Gaza to nuclear safety by claiming a possible health hazard arising from alleged Israeli use of depleted uranium (DU) munitions. The ultimate lack of Arab polemics was despite the fact that the Board Chair had told us prior to the Board meeting that the Arab Group expected a response to its letter on Gaza DU. Moreover, a friendly Arab ambassador told us only minutes before "Any Other Business" that Arab states would make statements on Gaza. We have not queried Arab missions on this topic since the Board meeting--in order not to risk unhelpfully resurfacing the matter--so do not have confirmation as to the Arabs' calculus. Mission believes, however, that the Arab silence may have arisen in part from Arab recognition that the Secretariat is not moving quickly toward any action in Gaza, as well as from our efforts to dissuade Director General (DG) ElBaradei from provoking a conversation on Gaza. Another possible factor was a private message to the DG's staff from the Israeli Ambassador that polemics on Gaza would cause the Ambassador to publicly rebuke the DG for his inappropriate press statements on Gaza. End Summary.

The Dog That Didn't Bark...

[1](#)2. (C) Per Ref cables and subsequent interactions with other IAEA missions in Vienna and IAEA Secretariat, the Arab Group intended to: raise under the "Any Other Business" (AOB) agenda item its allegations of Israeli use of depleted uranium (DU) munitions in Gaza, call for IAEA assistance in "investigating" the issue, and likely use the issue as a platform to make statements abhorring Israel's actions in Gaza more generally. However, the March 2009 Board meeting concluded with no Arab statements on the issue. This is despite the fact that only moments before the AOB agenda item opened for discussion, Moroccan Ambassador Zniber (protect) volunteered to MsnOff that there would be statements on the Gaza issue. In response to MsnOff's query at the time, Zniber claimed that the interventions would be focused on the appropriate role for the Agency in supporting assessment of any radiological risk, vice a broader "investigation." Zniber also said that he and others had rejected suggestions "from some" to attempt to link any IAEA sample-taking in Gaza

with the Syrian claims that uranium found at the Al-Kibar site was somehow introduced via Israeli munitions.

...But Why?

¶3. (C) IAEA External Relations and Policy Coordination (EXPO) chief Vilmos Cserveny told Msnoff on March 13 that the Secretariat had had no direct contact with the Arab Group on the issue during Board week. The Arabs knew, Cserveny said, that the WHO and UNEP viewed on-site work in Gaza as not timely (due to the security situation). They knew further that Israel had responded to the IAEA that it could help get IAEA personnel into Gaza, but could not ensure their security in the territory, and that Israel had provided a limited written response to one but not to a second IAEA letter on the matter. Cserveny said he surmised Arab ambassadors had concluded there was nothing to be gained by raising the matter in the Board. (Note: He added the Secretariat would have to take appropriate action in Gaza with partner agencies if Member States pressed their query. End Note.) Absent a decision to press the call at this Board meeting for Secretariat study of Gaza, the Arab states were without a germane issue on which to append political criticism of the military action. However, we expect at least two further relevant factors may have helped persuade the Arab group to stand down.

¶4. (C) First, Israeli Ambassador Michaeli told us he had communicated to EXPO Chief Cserveny during the run-up to the Board that, should the DG or Board members engage in polemics on the Gaza issue, Michaeli was under firm instructions to fire back by making reference to the inappropriateness of the DG's public comments on Gaza. Michaeli said he would have to suggest that in light of those comments the IAEA should recuse itself from any involvement in Gaza (even if otherwise appropriate in regard to determining any radiological hazard). Michaeli did not disagree with MsnOff's repeated expressions of concern that such an approach would only provoke even more unhelpful dynamics in the Board room and commented throughout the week of the Board to MsnOff that he was doing what he could to persuade Jerusalem to take a less provocative approach. Michaeli also told MsnOff in confidence that, should the IAEA go to Gaza, "they will find nothing." (Comment: Michaeli might also have conveyed to Cserveny that there had been no Israeli use of depleted uranium munitions in Gaza as part of Michaeli's personal campaign to avoid further poisoning the atmosphere in the Board on Middle East issues. End comment.)

¶5. (C) Further, we expect Mission efforts directly with the Secretariat and others also may have helped avert Gaza polemics. Ambassador cautioned the Board Chair (Algeria) in pre-Board consultations against the Arab group stoking a political debate on Gaza in the Board. DCM had earlier secured a commitment from both Cserveny and IAEA Spokesperson Melissa Fleming that the DG would steer clear of Gaza in his opening statement to the Board; the DG's statement made no mention of Gaza. As noted above, Mission was engaged with Michaeli over the course of several days to encourage Israel to hold its fire if possible. And finally, in the above exchange with Moroccan Ambassador Zniber and others, Mission has taken any opportunity to underline that while we would have no objection to the IAEA playing the same role in Gaza that it has played elsewhere in ensuring no radiological hazard, it would only undercut collective desires for an effective IAEA to politicize this issue and press for IAEA activities beyond its mandate.

¶6. (C) As to future developments, the IAEA continues to consider a possible visit to Gaza, but decisions/planning on that front appear to be on a slow track. Mission understands that United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) activities in Gaza to date have included sample-taking, but the scope of the UNEP effort does not include a search for depleted uranium. Instead, all parties would look to the IAEA to pursue the depleted uranium question as appropriate. Mission

will continue to monitor the evolution of the issue at the IAEA. If IAEA were to plan and implement a radiological survey in Gaza, it could cause the issue to re-emerge as a possible catalyst for comment in the Board. Ambassador Michaeli told MsnOff that he approached Egyptian Ambassador Fawzi at the end of the Board session and joked about his disappointment at missing the opportunity to respond to Arab statements on Gaza. Fawzi returned the joke by commenting that, "in the spirit of friendly Israeli-Egyptian relations," Fawzi would be sure to mention it next time. Until and unless Mission sees signs that the Arabs are reinvigorating momentum to make an issue of Gaza at the IAEA, Mission has chosen not to raise the matter with Arab counterparts in the wake of their silence at the Board, but rather to let this sleeping dog lie.

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